

**BLIND AND LOW VISION SERVICES  
MONTANA SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF AND BLIND**

**Step  
by Step**

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Step  
by Step



TO THE  
ADULTS AND CHILDREN  
OF MONTANA  
LIVING WITH VISION LOSS

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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People with a visual disability whether they are totally blind or have some degree of useful vision may at times require the assistance of a sighted guide. For the sake of simplicity the term traveler is used in this booklet to refer to the person who is being guided, whether totally blind or partially sighted.



## Sighted Guide

Travel with a sighted guide is a basic orientation and mobility (O&M) skill. Even independent travelers use sighted guide techniques for orientation and familiarization to new locations. The traveler may prefer to use sighted guide techniques when moving among a group of people or when traveling in unfamiliar places. Travelers with multiple disabilities may need to rely on sighted guide skills for their O&M needs.

Appearance and efficiency are important in developing sighted guide techniques, but safety



is essential. Although a guide needs to gain and maintain the confidence of the traveler, both members of the sighted guide team share the responsibility for safe, efficient, and graceful travel.

When employing any O&M technique, it is important to remember that some variations may be necessary to meet the capabilities of the individuals being guided.

## INITIAL CONTACT

When approaching a traveler, the guide initiates the greeting, identifies oneself, and inquires if assistance is needed. If so, the guide touches the traveler's hand with the back of her hand. This allows the traveler to locate the guide's





INITIAL CONTACT

arm and slide his grip hand above the guide's elbow.

## GRIP



The traveler grips the guide's arm just above the elbow with four fingers positioned on the inside and the thumb on the outside of the guide's arm. The grip must be firm enough for the traveler to maintain while walking, but not so tight as to cause discomfort to the guide.

Grasping the guide's arm above the elbow provides maximum feedback to the traveler and allows the guide to retain the use of her forearm and hand.

## GRIP VARIATIONS

Travelers, who require more support to maintain their balance while walking may slide their grip hand between the guide's body and arm and grasp the guide's



forearm or hand. The guide's forearm is bent at the elbow and held close to his body to provide additional stability and support.

Small children may not be able to comfortably reach the guide's upper arm and their hands may be too small to establish the standard



sighted guide grip. The child should be encouraged, none the less, to begin establishing



the correct grip on either the guide's wrist or first and middle fingers. As the child grows the grip with the correct finger positioning can easily be moved from the guide's fingers to the wrist and to the upper arm.

## ALIGNMENT

The guide's arm is held in a relaxed position, with the upper arm next to and parallel to her side. The traveler's grip arm is also relaxed with the upper arm held next to and parallel to his side. The traveler's arm is bent at



the elbow with the forearm pointing forward. This grip will align the traveler's and guide's shoulders and position the traveler approximately one-half step behind the guide.

## Transferring Sides

The traveler may change his position in relation to the guide by transferring to the guide's alternate side. This may be necessary to open doors, use handrails, negotiate stairwells or simply for convenience.



SLIDE TRANSFER GRIP



Slide transfers and hand over hand are the two methods of transferring sides.

## SLIDE TRANSFERS

When a change of position is initiated, the traveler places the back of his free hand on the guide's arm directly above his grip hand. The traveler then releases his grip hand and turns in the direction of the transfer moving to the guide's opposite side. As the traveler moves to the guide's opposite side, contact is maintained by trailing the hand across



SLIDE TRANSFER

the guide's back. The traveler should initially turn more than 90 degrees in order to avoid stepping on the guide's heels.

To assist the traveler in reestablishing the sighted guide grip, the guide may move her elbow back into the path of the trailing hand. As soon as the traveler reaches the guide's opposite arm, he should resume the sighted guide position and grip.

This procedure can be practiced while the guide is standing still, but eventually



HAND OVER HAND GRIP



should occur while both the guide and traveler are walking at a normal pace. Although the guide needs to verbally request a traveler to transfer sides, travelers should also inform guides of their intention to “switch” sides.

## HAND OVER HAND

An alternate transferring sides technique requires the traveler to grasp the guide's arm with free hand and extend his arms.

The traveler releases the original grip hand and trails

across the guide's back with the back of his hand, fingers relaxed and slightly curled. When the guide's opposite arm is located,



the traveler releases the grip on the original side and sidesteps in the direction



of the transfer, while simultaneously establishing the proper grip and alignment with his free hand.

## Narrow Passageway

This technique is useful when negotiating areas in which the combined body widths of the guide and traveler make walking difficult. A single-file position may be necessary when negotiating aisles, doorways and crowded spaces. The guide moves her arm,



NONVERBAL CLUE



EXTENSION



ALIGNMENT

positioning her wrist toward the small of the back and extends her arm.

This is a nonverbal clue for the traveler to extend his arm fully and move behind the guide. By extending their arms the possibility of the traveler stepping on the guide's heels is minimized.

When the passageway has been negotiated, the guide returns her arm to her side indicating that the sighted guide grip and alignment should be reestablished.

# Self Protective Techniques

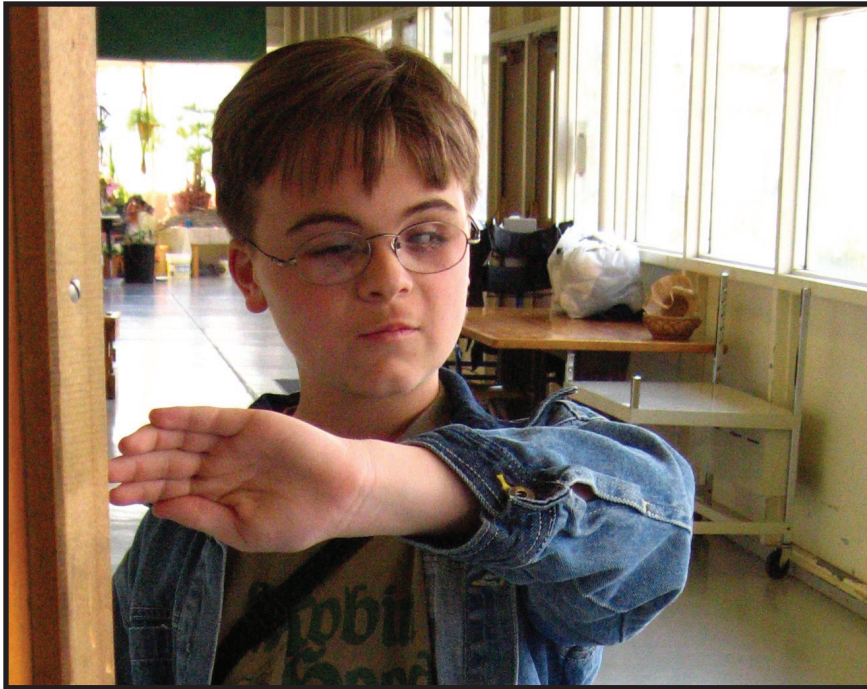
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When traveling independently in familiar and unfamiliar areas people use self-protective techniques.

## UPPER HAND AND FOREARM

This technique provides a protective shield for the traveler's upper body. The traveler's arm is positioned between chin and shoulder height 6 to 8 inches in front of the body. The elbow is bent so that the fingers extend





UPPER HAND AND FOREARM



LOWER HAND AND FOREARM

two inches past the traveler's opposite shoulder, with the palm facing outward in order to contact objects in the environment safely.

## LOWER HAND AND FOREARM

Protection to the lower body is provided by this technique. The hand and arm are extended downward in front of the body. The palm of the hand is again 6 to 8 inches from the body, but the palm faces toward the body. This technique is useful in detecting tables, chairs and counters.



# Negotiating Doorways

Negotiating doorways is most efficient when the guide and traveler work as a team. While the guide opens the door, responsibility is shared. The traveler takes control of the door to allow both members of the team to negotiate the doorway. After the doorway is negotiated, it is the traveler's responsibility to close the door. To control the door, the traveler, needs to be positioned on the hinge side of the door. Initially the



PARTIAL TRANSFER

guide may need to verbally explain if the door opens to the left or right and if it is a push or pull door. With experience, the traveler will be able to interpret the guide's body movement to determine whether a door opens to the left or right and if the door is being pushed or pulled. After the traveler has determined what type of door is being negotiated, a full or partial transfer of sides may be initiated.

For pull doors, the guide positions the door to ensure



PULL DOOR



the traveler's safety. When approaching the door the traveler initiates upper hand and forearm and sweeps the hand and forearm outward to contact the door. The sweeping motion is initiated at the elbow with the traveler maintaining the upper hand and forearm position. The guide positions the door so that the traveler contacts the latch edge with the palm of the free hand, keeping the fingers relaxed and slightly curled.

For doors that push,  
the traveler keeps his elbow



PUSH DOOR

constant, while sweeping his forearm and hand outward.

He then contacts the door

with the palm of his hand and forearm near the latch edge and pushes.

Contacting the door near the latch edge helps avoid fingers being pinched between the door and jamb. After negotiating the



doorway, the traveler releases or closes the door and resumes the proper sighted guide positioning and grip.

## Stairs and Curbs

The guide may verbally alert the traveler when they are approaching stairs or curbs. With practice, the traveler can determine from environmental clues and body language that stairs or curbs are being approached. The stairs and curbs squarely, never at an angle. This ensures that



the guide reaches the stairs first.

If necessary the traveler may transfer sides in order to use the banister. The guide initially comes to a full stop at the edge of the steps. With practice and increasing confidence, the full stop is faded to a brief pause.

When the guide stops or pauses at the edge of the first step, the traveler aligns himself by moving forward and standing beside the guide. With the traveler on the banister side of the steps, the



guide needs only to reach past him and grasp the banister if the traveler is in danger of moving too far forward.

Once positioned, the traveler grasps the banister and follows one step behind the guide. The traveler may prefer a verbal clue indicating the slope of the stairs; however the guide's initial motion will tell the traveler if stairs are ascending or descending. This information may have already been determined from the slope of the banister.

The guide always remains



ONE STEP BEHIND



one step ahead of the traveler. The guide pauses on landings to indicate that the traveler has one step remaining. The guide and traveler resume their normal sighted guide positioning upon completing the stairs. A curb is treated as a single step.

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## Reversing Directions

When space is limited and the guide and traveler wish to reverse their direction, they first come to a complete stop. The guide then indicates that contact is to be broken by rotating her arm inward. The traveler releases the guide's arm and both guide and traveler initiate a 180 degree turn toward each other. This looks natural and allows the guide to continually monitor the traveler's safety. Once the turn is completed, the guide makes

contact with the traveler to reestablish the sighted guide grip.

## Seating

The guide brings the traveler within a step of the seat and verbalizes the seat's position. The traveler carefully moves one leg toward the seat until it has been contacted. He then faces the seat using upper hand and forearm for protection while bending and reaching toward the chair. He determines if any objects are



REVERSING DIRECTION



on the chair by systematically brushing the seat with the back of his hand. Sweeping the seat in a circular pattern or in a grid from front to back and side to side allows the traveler to determine the characteristics of the chair, i.e., the position of the seat, the presence of armrests, etc.. The traveler then places the back of both legs against the edge of the seat (squares off) and sits down.

## SEATING AT A TABLE

When showing the traveler to a chair at a table, the guide places the hand of her gripped



CLEARING A SEAT





FINDING THE CHAIR

arm on the back of the chair. The traveler trails down the guide's arm until the back of the chair is contacted. He then

locates the table with his free hand and judges how far out to pull the chair. The traveler should always keep one hand on the table as a constant reference until completely seated. Chairs on rollers or





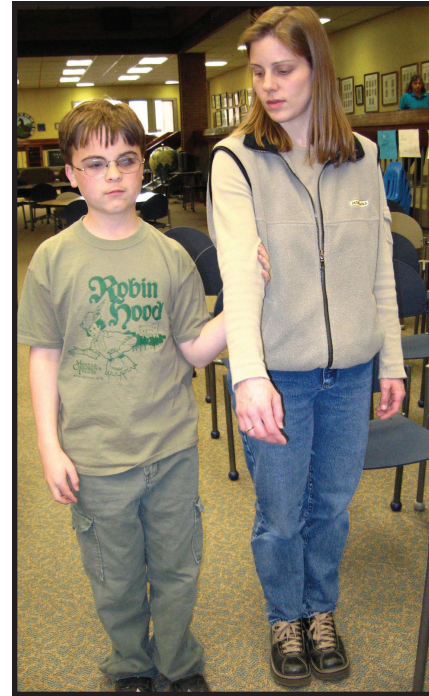
swivels may be stabilized by having the traveler lean into the chair. If the chair does not have armrests, it may be easier for the traveler to square off against the side of the seat and swing his legs under the table. The guide re-establishes contact when it is time to leave. It is the traveler's responsibility to push the chair up to the table upon leaving.

## AUDITORIUM SEATING

This procedure can be used in churches, auditoriums, theaters or other places where

seats are aligned in rows. The guide and the traveler walk down the aisle using sighted guide. When the guide stops, indicating they have arrived at the row they plan to enter, the traveler positions himself next to the guide and releases the sighted guide grip. He lightly contacts the back of the guide's hand with the back of his hand while sidestepping down the row of seats. This presents a natural and unobtrusive appearance. The traveler trails the back of the seats of the row

in front of him to maintain alignment with the guide and minimize the possibility of contacting persons already seated. The traveler should be careful not to disturb any articles hanging over the backs of seats. The guide indicates the appropriate seats have been reached by stopping and breaking contact with the traveler. The traveler squares off and simultaneously clears the seat and sits. The guide reestablishes contact with the traveler to indicate when it is time to exit the row. The guide





may either precede or follow the traveler into or out of a row of seats.

# Automobiles

When entering a vehicle, the traveler can function independently with or without a guide. When working with a guide, the guide places her hand on the door latch to enable the traveler to trail down her arm, locate the latch and open the door.

When working independently, after he has contacted



LOCATING THE LATCH

the car, the traveler trails the side of the vehicle until the center post between the front and rear side windows is found. He then locates the latch which is usually just below the window and to the right of the centerpost.

Gaining control of the door allows the traveler to judge the width of the door opening and the orientation of the vehicle. After the door is opened the traveler contacts the edge of the roof with his free hand to determine its

exact location. This hand is then used to clear the seat. The traveler may wish to re-contact the roof for support while taking his seat and to



TRAILING TO LOCATE THE LATCH



assure himself of adequate head clearance. Once seated the traveler verbalizes he is shutting the door. When exiting the traveler opens the door, contacts the roof with the free hand, exits the car and indicates verbally that he is planning to close the door. For those travelers who are also cane users, the cane always follows the traveler into the vehicle when boarding and precedes them out when exiting.

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CLEARING THE SEAT

# Additional Tips

- Keep doors entirely open or closed
- Keep cupboards closed
- Inform travelers when furniture is moved
- Tell travelers when you are leaving
- Leave travelers in contact with an object, i.e., wall, table, etc, when you leave
- Travelers with dogs may choose sighted guide techniques or verbal directions. They may also instruct their dogs to follow.

# Contacts

## Blind and Low Vision Services

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MISSOULA, MT 59808  
(406) 329-5400

BUTTE

700 CASEY STREET  
BUTTE, MT 59701  
(406) 496-4925

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2121 ROSEBUD DRIVE SUITE C  
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